

Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Rape Myth Acceptance: Preliminary Findings From a Sample of Primarily LGBTQ-Identified Survey Respondents

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This study is among the first to examine the relationship between sexual orientation and rape myth adherence using a nationwide survey of primarily lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) respondents ($n = 184$). The more established Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale and a modified Male Rape Survey serve as the primary instruments to test both rape myth adherence and instrument-appropriateness. Results suggest that respondents were most likely to support myths that discredit sexual assault allegations or excuse rape as a biological imperative and least likely to support myths related to physical resistance. Consistent with previous work, men exhibited higher levels of rape myth adherence than women. Regarding sexual orientation, respondents who identified as queer consistently exhibited lower levels of rape myth adherence than respondents who identified as gay.

Keywords: rape myths; LGBQ; sexual orientation; gender; sexual assault

Early feminist scholars pointed out that rape is an act of violence committed by men which reinforces a sexual hierarchy in which women are devalued and a culture which condones violence against women (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Groth & Burgess, 1978). Inaccurate perceptions about sexual assault, known as *rape myths*, contribute to this culture by generally undermining the seriousness of sexual assault, removing accountability for the assault from the perpetrator, and placing blame on the victim. These rape myths remain pervasive and continue to generate significant scholarly (see Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) and political interest (see White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault, 2014). Burt (1980) first described rape myths as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (p. 217). To this, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) added that rape myths, “justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). Violence against women has been and remains a predominant concern for academics, and for good reason. Women are more likely to be victims of sexual assault than are men (Walters, Chen, & Breiding, 2013), and many of the beliefs underlying key

myths about sexual assault are based in historical, cultural, and patriarchal understandings of sex. Although literature on rape myths recognizes the gender dynamics of sexual assault, scholarship has not yet fully addressed how sexual orientation may play a role in predicting rape myth adherence.

Given that sexual orientation is a strongly implied (and sometimes explicitly stated) component of many rape myths, failure to assess the role of sexual orientation in understanding rape myths is an important oversight. Some research suggests that sexual minority groups are less likely to adhere to rape myths than the heterosexual population (i.e., Gay men are less likely to be rape myth adhering than straight men; Davies & McCartney, 2003). Knowing that sexual minorities are more likely to be victimized than the heterosexual population (Walters et al., 2013), and that rape myths are reflective of beliefs that encourage heterosexual male privilege and behavior (Chapleau & Oswald, 2013; Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008), it is important to incorporate sexual orientation in a way that acknowledges the heteronormativity of rape myths.

We take two approaches to addressing this gap in the literature. First, we test rape myths that include both same-sex and opposite-sex pairings. Second, we intentionally recruit a diverse, sample of sexual minority respondents who identified primarily as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and/or questioning (LGBQ). The sample includes a small number of heterosexual respondents who we include for comparison purposes but did not actively seek for participation. Our recruitment strategy, which relied primarily on affiliation with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning (LGBTQ) student organizations, also allowed for the inclusion of heterosexual members of such organizations. Using established practices in data collection among sexual minority communities (see Riggle, Rostosky, & Reedy, 2005) our work is groundbreaking not only in methodology but also in its theoretical contribution. According to Suarez and Gadalla's (2010) meta-analysis of research examining rape myth attitudes, in only four studies was the respondent's sexual orientation reported but then was tangential to the analyses. Haywood and Swank's (2008) work on rape myth adherence among college students is one of a few notable exceptions because sexual orientation was included as a predictor. Although the variable did not encompass all sexual orientations and forced respondents to identify on a continuum from 1 (*completely homosexual*) to 5 (*completely heterosexual*), the theoretical importance of sexual orientation in predicting rape myth adherence was acknowledged. Given that most research has focused on the relationship between gender and rape myth adherence, this work was a much needed addition.

The present research places the respondent's sexual orientation at the center of analysis to better illustrate the heteronormativity of widely held rape myths. Presumably, in comparison to the heterosexual community, irrespective of gender, sexual minorities should exhibit different levels of rape myth adherence because of different social experiences, particularly in terms of victimization (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). And, as our work demonstrates, intra-group differences among the sexual minority community (e.g. between gay and bisexual respondents) deserve analytic attention. The widely used Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS; Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999) is used in conjunction with the Male Rape Survey (MRS; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992) and a modification of the MRS. Though lesser used, the MRS is the single most used instrument to date that assesses myths regarding gendered constructions of victims and perpetrators (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Specifically, the MRS was designed to assess myths about males as victims of male-perpetrated and of female-perpetrated rape. We also include a modification of the MRS that addresses myths regarding female victims of female-perpetrated rape.

A NOTE ON QUEER RESEARCH, IDENTITY, AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Our work is informed by queer theories and perspectives which have recently garnered significant attention in criminology (Ball, 2014; Woods, 2015). Statistics clearly demonstrate that identifying as a woman and as a member of a sexual minority group puts one at higher risk for sexual assault (Walters et al., 2013). Thus, the concept of *gendered heterosexism* (“discrimination that is simultaneously sexist and heterosexist in nature”; Friedman & Leaper, 2010, p. 152) is useful in understanding how societal views about sexual orientation and gender contribute to views and experiences of sexual violence. Broadly speaking, we assume that views about sexual violence in the sexual minority community will differ from heterosexuals as the two communities differ in several social and political ways (Lewis, Rogers, & Sherrill, 2011). Most important, however, we expect differences *within* the LGBTQ community. The perceptions of sexual assault of gay men, for example, are expectedly different than the perceptions of men who identify as queer.

The term *queer* is more inclusive than *LGBTQ* because it connotes an active inclusion of different sexual orientations and gender identities but simultaneously defies strict definition (Gray & Desmarais, 2014; Jagose, 1996). We use the term *LGBTQ* and/or *sexual minority community* in lieu of the *Queer community* to acknowledge the limitations of quantitative work and reflect our sample participants’ responses. Our chosen terminology refers more loosely to a different demographic group than a community that actively challenges essentialist social constructions (Gray & Desmarais, 2014). Although acknowledging that shared experiences of discrimination justify the study of sexual minorities more generally, our use of this term is based on empirical evidence that stresses *difference* in social identity (e.g., Friedman & Leaper, 2010). Balsam and Mohr (2007), for example, find that lesbian women are more likely to identify as part of the LGBTQ community than bisexual women.

Queer theory challenges researchers to develop more critical methods of study by questioning the fundamental tenets of doing social science work (Plummer, 2005). To this point, surveys have not often been employed by queer theorists who have primarily relied on qualitative methods (Ball, 2014). Adding descriptive control variables as measures of sexual orientation is not sufficient, may promote essentialist conclusions, and inadequately addresses the complexity and interrelationships between gender and sexuality (Ball, 2014; Woods, 2014). We reluctantly treat gender as a binary (male/female) in one of our analyses to build on previous research on rape myth adherence, but also in recognition of the binary’s salience, particularly in terms of power and privilege (e.g., Nagoshi, Terrell, Nagoshi, & Brzuzy, 2014). Current research on sexual minority communities demonstrates the variable’s efficacy in predicting social identity by sexual orientation (e.g., Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Friedman & Leaper, 2010). Although heavily influenced by queer theories, we use traditional, socially constructed categories of sexual orientation in our comparative analyses.

Our research takes a queer perspective in that we critique widely used instruments, their corresponding assumptions, and our approach is explicitly nonheteronormative. The limited research on sexual orientation and victimization rates suggests that the LGBTQ community is disproportionately victimized by hate crimes (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2011), intimate partner violence, and sexual victimization (Walters et al., 2013). In addition, Long, Ullman, Long, Mason, and Starzynski (2007) provide compelling quantitative evidence indicating that the experience of sexual violence, disclosure, and so on, is affected by the sexual orientation of the victim. In short, sexual orientation *matters* and understanding *how* it matters can help us better understand sexual violence in all communities.

RAPE MYTHS—A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Homophobia (Davies, Gilson, & Rogers, 2012; Davies & McCartney, 2003; Kassing, Beesley, & Frey, 2005), ageism, classism, religious intolerance, and racism (Aosved & Long, 2006) are all correlates of rape myth adherence suggesting that systems of power and intolerance affect a person's view of sexual violence. Still, a person's gender (measured dichotomously as male or female) remains the strongest, most consistent, predictor of a person's propensity to hold rape myths. Early studies established that men are more likely than women to believe rape myths (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995), a finding which has since been corroborated among different populations (e.g., Chapleau et al., 2008; Davies et al., 2012; Haywood & Swank, 2008). Closer examinations of these and other studies further suggest that the victim's gender in the hypothetical scenario is an essential component of the rape myth ideology. There is a widespread belief in Western culture that "real" rape victims are exclusively female and "real" rapists are exclusively male (Gavey, 2005; Sleath & Bull, 2010). By the same token, women who are victimized are expected to conform to "traditional" views of female victimhood.

Rape myths are part of larger social scripts surrounding sexuality and sexual assault and heterosexism is an indispensable component in many of these scripts (Chapleau & Oswald, 2013; Gerger, Kley, Bohner, & Siebler, 2007). Like women who transgress gender roles are blamed more than women who do not, victims who violate heterosexist norms are assigned more blame than victims who do not. Wakelin and Long's (2003) test of the "sexual attraction hypothesis" found that people rated gay male victims as more blame-worthy in their own sexual assault than heterosexual male victims in large part because of homophobic beliefs and misconceptions about gay men. It may be, however, that LGBQ victims internalize heterosexist rape myths and damaging stereotypes about the LGBQ community which may serve to further prolong the healing process.

Rape myth adherence inhibits the healing process for survivors of sexual assault (Ullman, 1996; Yamawaki, 2007). When victims of sexual assault believe them to be true (Ullman, 1996), that may contribute to their decision not to report (Starzynski, Ullman, Filipas, & Townsend, 2005; Ullman, 2010; Ullman & Filipas, 2001). Victims who decide to disclose or officially report their assault may face unsupportive and harmful reactions because of the rape myth adherence of the person(s) to whom they disclose. Recent work demonstrates the salience of the "classic rape" perspective: Victims and "bystanders" are less likely to report an experience that does not correspond to social beliefs about rape (Clay-Warner & McMahon-Howard, 2009). Survivors who fail to fit the mold of the "real" rape victim (i.e., a female victim who was overpowered by an unknown male attacker) are less likely to be believed by friends and family, and are often revictimized by professionals in the medical community (Ullman, Foyne, & Tang, 2010; Ullman & Townsend, 2007) and the criminal justice system (Du Mont, Miller, & Myhr, 2003; Mennicke, Anderson, Oehme, & Kennedy, 2014; Rich & Seffrin, 2012; Starzynski et al., 2005). Consequently, LGBQ identified victims, particularly male victims and/or victims of female-perpetrated violence, may be less likely not seek and/or receive supportive, professional services. The full consequences of heterosexist rape myth adherence on LGBQ populations are unknown, but it is possible that the social pressure exerted on victims by the societal prevalence of rape myths is felt more acutely by members of marginalized communities.

In the first national study of sexual violence by sexual orientation, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey found that the lifetime risk of sexual violence for

bisexual men (47.4%) and gay men (40.2%) were at substantially higher than their heterosexual (20.8%) counterparts (Walters et al., 2013). The lifetime risk of sexual violence was somewhat higher for lesbian women (46.4%) than heterosexual women (43.3%), but the risk of lifetime sexual violence victimization among bisexual women (74.9%) was staggering. These findings indicate a need for a deeper understanding of the experience of sexual assault in the LGBTQ community.

The research reported here identifies different perceptions within Queer communities, specifically in rape myth adherence. Limited work in this area suggests that gender and sexual orientation factor considerably into assessments of rape victims (see Davies, Rogers, & Whitelegg, 2009; Wakelin & Long, 2003). To our knowledge, no study to date has yet undertaken an investigation of rape myth adherence in the LGBTQ community.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To address this gap, we recruited a sample in whom most respondents identified as LGBTQ, which allowed us to make comparisons of the level of rape myth adherence based on sexual orientation. Our sampling strategy was accompanied by the expectation that these participants will, in general, be less supportive of rape myth attitudes than most college students, who have served as a source for most analyses of rape myths (see Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Different backgrounds and perspectives because of sexual orientation, combined with an increased risk of sexual assault victimization, may result in markedly different perceptions about rape and sexual assault. College students are arguably exposed to more differing viewpoints and belief systems than the general population, thus reducing rape myth adherence (White & Kurpius, 2002). “The day-to-day experiences of being a gay or lesbian student in a heterosexist society may intrinsically dispel rape myths, while heterosexual students need access to feminist classrooms to challenge rape myths” (Haywood & Swank, 2008, p. 381).

Given that no prior research has fully assessed the impact of sexual orientation on rape myth adherence, we present three primary research questions rather than specific hypotheses: First, which rape myths are most relevant to this sample of LGBTQ respondents and heterosexual allies? Second, does the impact of gender on rape myth adherence remain significant among LGBTQ respondents? Third, does rape myth adherence differ based on respondents’ sexual orientations? In answering these questions, we consider the suitability of the oft-used rape myth instruments (described in the “Method” section) in LGBTQ populations.

METHOD

The use of snowball and convenience sampling methods is well-established in LGBTQ research and has been demonstrated to produce reliable and representative results (see Riggle et al., 2005). Our nationwide recruitment methodology was chosen not only in hopes of casting a wider net but also to obtain respondents who would be willing to answer highly sensitive questions about sexual assault (and retain anonymity). Thus, between May and September of 2013, participants were recruited in three ways: First, LGBTQ and allied student organizations registered on the website Campuspride.org and housed on campuses

of at least 10,000 undergraduates were contacted and encouraged to share the survey with potential participants in whatever medium that they usually used to communicate with their members. Second, we sent recruitment announcements via four listservs (National Sexual Assault Prevention, American Society of Criminology's Division on Women and Crime, Association of LGBT Issues in Counseling in Alabama, and the Counselor Education and Supervision Network) and encouraged recipients to distribute announcements to others who may be interested in participating. Final, we ran a recruitment announcement in *The Criminologist*, the newsletter of the American Society of Criminology. Participants were eligible for a drawing to win one of five \$50 Amazon gift-cards.

Participants

Three-hundred and six respondents participated in the study. One hundred and eighty-four respondents provided their sexual orientation as lesbian ($n = 40$), gay ($n = 38$), bisexual ($n = 32$), queer ($n = 49$), questioning ($n = 2$), or heterosexual ($n = 23$). Because sexual orientation is central to the research questions being addressed here, the analytic sample included only these 184 respondents (Table 1). Forty-seven (25.5%) reported their gender identity as male, 119 (64.7%) as female. Eighteen respondents (9.8%) either preferred not to answer or identified outside of the gender binary (identities including agender, bigender, genderfluid, genderqueer, transgender, and transsexual). Analyses focused on gender were restricted to those 166 respondents who identified as either male or female. This decision was made, in part, out of methodological necessity given the small number of nonbinary respondents. Our intent was not to reinforce the gender binary nor exclude nonbinary respondents; it was only to measure the effect of differences between the two gender identities most commonly assessed in work on rape myth adherence.

Approximately 72% of the sample ($n = 132$) was aged 30 or younger. Most of the sample consisted of current students (44% undergraduate, 20.7% graduate/professional). Seventy-five percent of the sample was White ($n = 138$) with additional respondents identifying as African American ($n = 9$), Hispanic ($n = 14$), American Indian/Alaska Native ($n = 7$), Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ($n = 3$), or preferring not to answer ($n = 5$). Respondents from 34 states participated, coming from each of the census-designated regions. Eighty-one percent of respondents ($n = 149$) said that two or more family members were aware of their sexual orientation.

Given that this research focuses on sexual orientation and perceptions of sexual violence, it is important to understand these aspects of our respondents' identities. Although gender and sexual orientation are often conflated, it is especially important when studying the LGBTQ community to allow open-ended responses and not limit gender to a dichotomous variable. Nearly 10% of this sample did not identify with the gender binary and within each sexual orientation included here, there were individuals who identified as both male and female. Furthermore, within the gay-, bisexual-, and queer-identified subsamples, there were respondents who reported a nonbinary gender identity. As shown in Table 2, respondents were more likely to identify as female than male for all sexual orientation categories apart from "gay." In all four LGBTQ orientations, more than 40% of respondents identified as rape survivors, whereas fewer than 20% of the heterosexual respondents identified as such. These prevalence levels are in line with the estimates provided by Walters and colleagues (2013), for lesbian, queer, and heterosexual respondents but slightly higher for gay respondents and somewhat lower for the bisexual respondents. All heterosexual respondents who identified as rape survivors had disclosed their assault to

TABLE 1. Sample Characteristics

	<i>N</i>	%
Sexual orientation		
Lesbian	40	21.7
Gay	38	20.7
Bisexual	32	17.4
Queer	49	26.6
Heterosexual	23	12.5
Gender		
Male	47	25.5
Female	119	64.7
Other/nonbinary	18	9.8
Age (years)		
19–20	39	21.2
21–30	93	50.5
31–40	29	15.7
41 or older	20	10.9
Race		
White	138	75.0
Black/African American	9	4.9
Hispanic	14	7.6
Other	14	7.6
Region		
West	38	20.7
South Central	36	19.6
South Atlantic	28	15.2
Midwest	42	22.8
Northeast	30	16.3
Family members aware of sexual orientation		
None	18	9.8
One	14	7.6
Two or more	39	21.2
All	110	59.8

Note. This includes 38 participants who reported that they had graduated or left the university and 17 participants who reported that they were not college students.

TABLE 2. Descriptive Statistics of Respondents’ Gender and Sexual Assault Experiences by Sexual Orientation

	Lesbian (<i>n</i> = 40)	Gay (<i>n</i> = 38)	Bisexual (<i>n</i> = 32)	Queer (<i>n</i> = 49)	Heterosexual (<i>n</i> = 23)
Respondents who identify as female	39 97.5%	2 5.6%	29 93.5%	29 59.2%	18 78.3%
Respondents who identify as male	1 2.5%	34 94.4%	2 6.5%	5 10.2%	5 21.7%
Respondents who do not identify with a binary gender	0 0.0%	2 5.3%	1 3.1%	15 30.6%	0 0.0%
Respondents who identify as rape survivors	17 42.5%	18 47.4%	14 43.8%	23 46.9%	4 17.4%
Respondents who identify as rape survivors and disclosed their assault	13 76.5%	15 83.3%	12 85.7%	20 87.0%	4 100.0%
Respondents who have experienced a sexual assault since age 14, based on the Sexual Experiences Survey	14 35.0%	14 36.8%	12 37.5%	17 34.7%	3 13.0%
Respondents who have received a sexual assault disclosure	27 67.5%	29 76.3%	23 71.9%	43 87.8%	17 73.9%

someone, but the same was not true for members of the LGBTQ orientations. Most LGBTQ respondents did disclose their victimization, with the lowest level of reporting among lesbians. Most respondents reported that they had received a disclosure of sexual assault from someone else.

Procedure

To determine which myths were held in our sample, we employed McMahon and Farmer’s (2011) revision of Payne and colleagues’ (1999) IRMAS, which was supported in a recent study (Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011, and promoted in the White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault, 2014). This 22-item instrument assesses five types of rape myths: (a) It wasn’t really rape (“If a girl doesn’t physically fight back, you can’t really say it was rape.”), (b) He didn’t mean to (“When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.”), (c) He didn’t mean to due to intoxication (“If both people are drunk, it can’t be rape.”), (d) She lied (“Rape accusations are often used as way of getting back at guys.”), and (e) She asked for it (“When girls go

to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.”). Respondents rated their level of agreement on a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating greater acceptance of rape myths. Despite its strength as a tool for measuring rape myth adherence, the IRMAS is limited in that it focuses almost exclusively on female victims of male-perpetrated rape.

To assess respondents' views of rape myth attitudes involving male victims, we used Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson's (1992) MRS, in which respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement (on a 6-point scale) with 12 statements. Six items focused on male victims of male perpetrators, and six focused on male victims of female perpetrators. We added six additional items to the MRS, to assess perceptions of female victims of female perpetrators. As in the IRMAS, higher scores indicate higher levels of agreement with rape myths (reverse-coded items were recoded as necessary).

RESULTS

We used *t* tests to assess which rape myths were most relevant to this sample of LGBTQ respondents and heterosexual allies (refer to the “full sample” statistics provided in Table 3). Overall levels of rape myth adherence were low, but there were many significant differences in the respondents' levels of agreement with different myths. The most strongly supported myth was, “If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.” This particular myth was more strongly held than all other statements except, “If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.” Overall, two types of myths appear to be most relevant. The first type of myth, represented in Statements 1, 4, 5, and 8, focuses on the male sex drive as a cause of sexual assault and fall in to the “He didn't mean to” subscale. These myths remove blame from the male perpetrator and dismiss the assault as an unavoidable biological reaction to a sexually charged encounter. The second most prevalent, representing the “She lied” subscale, found in Statements 3, 6, and 9, questions the veracity of rape allegations by accusing women of lying because of regret or revenge.

Myths related to physical resistance appear to be least relevant. More than 98% of the sample “strongly disagreed” with the statement that “if the accused rapist doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape.” More than 85% of the respondents “strongly disagreed” with the other three statements related to physical resistance (Statements 19, 20, and 21 in Table 3). In other words, at least in this sample of mostly LGBTQ-identified respondents (heterosexual), sexual assault is no longer understood as a crime in which the victim needs to demonstrate that she was overpowered by her (male) attacker.

Respondent levels of agreement with statements from the MRS (Table 4) were also relatively low. Still, significant differences emerged between some of the ratings based on the gender of the alleged victim and perpetrator. In the first set of statements, respondents were significantly more likely to believe that “it is impossible for a woman to rape a man” than for a man to rape a man or for a woman to rape a woman. Respondents were also less likely to believe, in the second set of statements, that “even a big, strong man can be raped by a woman” than that “a big, strong woman could be raped by another woman.” Finally, in the fifth set of statements shown in Table 4, respondents were less likely to believe that men who were raped by a woman would be “very upset by the incident” compared to women who were raped by another man or woman who were raped by a woman. Given that the gender of the perpetrator was an important consideration to these respondents, we include the gender of the respondent.

TABLE 3. Full Sample Mean Responses to IRMAS Statements From Most to Least Strongly Supported Myths; Significant Differences by Respondent Gender in Sample Limited to LGBQ Respondents

Answer Choices Ranged From 1 to 5	Respondents Who Identify as LGBQ					
	Full Sample (<i>n</i> = 184)		Males (<i>n</i> = 42)		Females (<i>n</i> = 101)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. If a guy is drunk, he might rape someone unintentionally.	1.92 ^a	1.14	1.95	1.13	1.84	1.06
2. If a girl initiates kissing or hooking up, she should not be surprised if a guy assumes she wants to have sex.	1.75 ^{ab}	1.03	2.07	1.22	1.63	0.91*
3. Girls who are caught cheating on their boyfriends sometimes claim that it was a rape.	1.69 ^b	0.98	2.05	1.29	1.56	0.81**
4. When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.	1.68 ^b	1.06	1.93	1.30	1.65	1.00
5. Guys don't usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away.	1.50 ^c	0.88	1.74	1.08	1.39	0.77*
6. Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.	1.50 ^c	0.95	1.90	1.32	1.37	0.76**
7. If a girl acts like a slut, eventually she is going to get into trouble.	1.45 ^{cd}	0.84	1.59	1.00	1.42	0.79
8. Rape happens when a guy's sex drive gets out of control.	1.34 ^{defgh}	0.74	1.38	0.73	1.33	0.70
9. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.	1.31 ^{defgh}	0.72	1.52	0.89	1.22	0.61*
10. If a girl is raped while she is drunk, she is at least somewhat responsible for letting things get out of control.	1.31 ^{defghi}	0.79	1.55	1.04	1.20	0.59*
11. A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.	1.30 ^{defghi}	0.69	1.60	0.99	1.17	0.43***
12. When girls are raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was unclear.	1.28 ^{defghij}	0.64	1.50	0.97	1.23	0.53*

(Continued)

TABLE 3. Full Sample Mean Responses to IRMAS Statements From Most to Least Strongly Supported Myths; Significant Differences by Respondent Gender in Sample Limited to LGBTQ Respondents (*Continued*)

Answer Choices Ranged From 1 to 5	Respondents Who Identify as LGBTQ					
	Full Sample (<i>n</i> = 184)		Males (<i>n</i> = 42)		Females (<i>n</i> = 101)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
13. When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.	1.25 ^{defghijk}	0.66	1.48	0.94	1.17	0.49*
14. If a girl doesn't say "no" she can't claim rape.	1.20 ^{fghijklm}	0.55	1.38	0.85	1.17	0.43
15. A lot of times, girls who claim they were raped just have emotional problems.	1.19 ^{ghijkl}	0.54	1.25	0.59	1.13	0.42
16. If both people are drunk, it can't be rape.	1.15 ^{hijklm}	0.47	1.29	0.63	1.14	0.45
17. It shouldn't be considered rape if a guy is drunk and didn't realize what he was doing.	1.14 ^{ijklm}	0.45	1.19	0.46	1.14	0.51
18. If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped.	1.11 ^{iklmn}	0.38	1.20	0.46	1.04	0.20**
19. A rape probably didn't happen if the girl has no bruises or marks.	1.05 ^{mno}	0.31	1.05	0.22	1.06	0.37
20. If a girl doesn't physically resist sex—even if protesting verbally—it can't be considered rape.	1.05 ^{no}	0.23	1.05	0.22	1.05	0.22
21. If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape.	1.03 ^{no}	0.18	1.05	0.22	1.04	0.20
22. If the accused "rapist" doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape.	1.02 ^{no}	0.13	1.05	0.22	1.01	0.10

Note. Higher ratings indicate higher levels of rape myth adherence. Means not sharing a common superscript differ significantly according to a *t* test, $p < .05$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

IRMAS = Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale.

TABLE 4. Full Sample Mean Responses to MRS Statements; Significant Differences by Respondent Gender in Sample Limited to LGBQ Respondents

Answer Choices Ranged From 1 to 6	Respondents Who Identify as LGBQ					
	Full Sample (<i>n</i> = 184)		Males (<i>n</i> = 42)		Females (<i>n</i> = 101)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Set 1						
It is impossible for a woman to rape a woman. ^a	1.19	0.86	1.40	1.31	1.06	0.24*
It is impossible for a woman to rape a man. ^b	1.37	0.98	1.38	1.17	1.27	0.65
It is impossible for a man to rape a man. ^a	1.11	0.70	1.12	0.77	1.07	0.52
Set 2						
Even a big, strong woman can be raped by a woman. (reverse coded) ^a	1.37	1.16	1.43	1.33	1.31	1.03
Even a big, strong man can be raped by a woman. (reverse coded) ^b	1.55	1.16	1.38	0.94	1.59	1.17
Even a big, strong man can be raped by another man. (reverse coded) ^{ab}	1.42	1.29	1.39	1.32	1.38	1.22
Set 3						
Most women who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not being more careful. ^a	1.17	0.70	1.29	0.87	1.17	0.78
Most men who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not being more careful. ^a	1.21	0.73	1.38	0.94	1.17	0.63
Most men who are raped by a man are somewhat to blame for not being more careful. ^a	1.20	0.74	1.31	0.87	1.07	0.29*
Set 4						
Most women who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting back. ^a	1.12	0.51	1.21	0.52	1.12	0.61

(Continued)

TABLE 4. Full Sample Mean Responses to MRS Statements; Significant Differences by Respondent Gender in Sample Limited to LGBQ Respondents (Continued)

Answer Choices Ranged From 1 to 6	Respondents Who Identify as LGBQ					
	Full Sample (<i>n</i> = 184)		Males (<i>n</i> = 42)		Females (<i>n</i> = 101)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Most men who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting back. ^a	1.18	0.63	1.33	0.98	1.14	0.51
Most men who are raped by a man are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting back. ^a	1.18	0.73	1.21	0.65	1.12	0.61
Set 5						
Most women who are raped by a woman are very upset by the incident. (reverse coded) ^a	1.39	0.91	1.38	0.76	1.42	0.94
Most men who are raped by a woman are very upset by the incident.(reverse coded) ^b	1.70	1.19	1.79	1.39	1.68	1.12
Most men who are raped by a man are very upset by the incident. (reverse coded) ^a	1.32	0.79	1.26	0.63	1.25	0.52
Set 6						
Most women who are raped by a woman do not need counseling after the incident. ^a	1.35	0.81	1.45	1.13	1.26	0.72
Most men who are raped by a woman do not need counseling after the incident. ^a	1.30	0.83	1.46	0.98	1.34	0.83
Most men who are raped by a man do not need counseling after the incident. ^a	1.25	0.68	1.40	0.99	1.14	0.35*

Note. Higher ratings indicate higher levels of rape myth adherence. Within each set, means not sharing a common superscript differ significantly according to a *t* test, *p* < .05.
p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

To address our second research question, and assess whether gender differences exist within the LGBTQ community, we limited the sample to respondents who identify as LGBTQ and also identify as either male or female (refer to Table 3). Respondents who did not identify with one of the binary genders were excluded in this particular analysis. Overall, LGBTQ-identified male respondents were significantly more likely than LGBTQ-identified female respondents to support 10 of the IRMAS statements. Five of these 10 statements fell in to the "She asked for it" subscale. Specifically, Statements 2, 10, 12, 13, and 18 place the blame for an assault on the victim by focusing on behaviors that may have "provoked" an assault. Another 4 of the 10 statements that differed based on respondent gender fell in the "She lied" subscale. These four statements, Statements 3, 6, 9, and 11, focus on victims' motives for making false rape claims and ultimately discredit rape allegations. The final statement that LGBTQ-identified male respondents were more likely than LGBTQ-identified female respondents to agree with was "Guys do not usually intend to force sex on a girl, but sometimes they get too sexually carried away."

Only three statements from the MRS differed significantly based on respondent gender, and again, LGBTQ-identified males indicated the highest levels of support (see Table 4). These three statements focused on assaults depicting victims and perpetrators of the same-sex. Males were more likely than females to agree with the statements "It is impossible for a woman to rape a woman," "Most men who are raped by a man are somewhat to blame for not being more careful," and "Most men who are raped by a man do not need counseling after the incident." Overall, it appears that LGBTQ-identified men are more likely to believe rape myths, even those pertaining to male victims.

To address our final research question, and assess the impact of specific sexual orientations on rape myth adherence, we first pooled the sample by gender (nonbinary, female, and male) and ran multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) models predicting groups of statements, organized in to their preexisting subscales. According to Wilks's lambda, the six MRS statements depicting woman-on-man sexual assaults, as a group, differed significantly by respondent sexual orientation, $F(24) = 1.60, p = .037$. The IRMAS statements related to the subscale "It wasn't really rape" were, as a group, marginally impacted by sexual orientation, $F(20) = 1.51, p = .070$. These MANOVA findings suggest that sexual orientation impacts rape myth adherence, but to gain a more nuanced understanding of these differences, we next ran overall F tests for mean differences in ratings each of the individual rape myth statements by sexual orientation (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and heterosexual).

Significant F statistics, reported in Table 5, indicated that respondents' levels of adherence to the individual rape myths differed significantly based on their sexual orientations (nonsignificant means, F statistics, and t test results are available from the corresponding author [CS] upon request but are not shown here in the interest of space). However, F statistics only indicate that differences among the means exist, not which groups differ significantly from one another. To determine which between-group differences were significant, we conducted t tests for the mean ratings provided by respondents who identified with each sexual orientation.

Three rape myths related to the theme of "She lied" were rated differently based on respondent sexual orientation. Gay respondents were more likely than queer respondents to believe that women falsely accuse men of rape out of revenge, $t(85) = -3.586, p = .001$, and that women first agree to have sex but later regret the decision and claim that they were raped, $t(85) = -2.697, p = .008$. Gay respondents were also more likely than both queer respondents, $t(85) = -3.696, p < .001$, and bisexual respondents, $t(68) = -2.238$,

TABLE 5. Rape Myth Adherence by Respondent Sexual Orientation

		Respondent sexual orientation				
		Lesbian (<i>n</i> = 40)	Gay (<i>n</i> = 38)	Bisexual (<i>n</i> = 32)	Queer (<i>n</i> = 49)	Hetero (<i>n</i> = 23)
		<i>F</i> Statistic <i>p</i> Value	<i>M</i> <i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> <i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> <i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> <i>SD</i>
Answer choices ranged from 1 to 5						
Rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys.	2.92 .02	1.49 0.89	1.92 1.26	1.49 0.88	1.20 0.54	1.52 0.95
A lot of times, girls who say they were raped agreed to have sex and then regret it.	2.69 .03	1.21 0.52	1.63 0.94	1.28 0.73	1.18 0.60	1.27 0.70
A lot of times, girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.	3.02 .02	1.28 0.72	1.58 0.89	1.19 0.47	1.08 0.28	1.43 0.90
When guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.	2.73 .03	1.77 0.99	2.11 1.35	1.62 1.01	1.35 0.69	1.48 0.99
When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble.	3.84 .01	1.33 0.66	1.53 0.98	1.16 0.52	1.02 0.14	1.30 0.70
Answer choices ranged from 1 to 6						
Most men who are raped by a woman are very upset by the incident. (reverse-coded)	3.02 .02	2.11 1.56	1.84 1.46	1.37 0.55	1.42 0.58	1.52 0.95
Most men who are raped by a man are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting back.	2.56 .04	1.05 0.22	1.34 0.82	1.19 0.90	1.02 1.40	1.52 1.44

(Continued)

TABLE 5. Rape Myth Adherence by Respondent Sexual Orientation (Continued)

	<i>F</i>	Respondent sexual orientation				
		Lesbian (<i>n</i> = 40)	Gay (<i>n</i> = 38)	Bisexual (<i>n</i> = 32)	Queer (<i>n</i> = 49)	Hetero (<i>n</i> = 23)
	Statistic <i>p</i> Value	<i>M</i> <i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> <i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> <i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> <i>SD</i>	<i>M</i> <i>SD</i>
Most men who are raped by a man are somewhat to blame for not being more careful.	4.94 .001	1.08 0.27	1.47 1.03	1.03 0.18	1.02 0.14	1.65 1.53
Most men who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not being more careful.	2.62 .04	1.28 0.88	1.53 1.13	1.03 0.18	1.10 0.42	1.17 0.65

Note. Higher ratings indicate higher levels of rape myth adherence. Means that differ significantly based on sexual orientation are discussed in text. Hetero = heterosexual.

$p = .028$, to agree that “girls who say they were raped often led the guy on and then had regrets.” Heterosexual respondents were also significantly more likely than were queer respondents to agree with this statement, $t(70) = -2.531, p = .014$.

Both gay respondents, $t(85) = -3.397, p = .001$, and lesbian respondents, $t(86) = -2.356, p = .021$, were more likely than queer respondents to agree with the statement that “when guys rape, it is usually because of their strong desire for sex.” Finally, regarding the statement, “When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for trouble,” there were also significant between-group differences. Respondents who identified as gay, $t(85) = -3.574, p = .001$; lesbian, $t(86) = -3.219, p = .002$; and heterosexual, $t(70) = -2.730, p = .008$, were more likely than queer respondents to agree with this statement. The ratings provided by gay, lesbian, and heterosexual respondents did not differ significantly from each other for this item.

Four items from the MRS differed significantly by respondent sexual orientation. First, lesbian respondents were significantly less likely than bisexual respondents, $t(68) = -2.522, p = .014$, and queer respondents, $t(84) = -2.833, p = .006$, to agree with the statement that “most men who are raped by a woman are very upset by the incident.” Second, gay respondents were significantly more likely than lesbian respondents, $t(75) = -2.248, p = .035$, and queer respondents, $t(85) = 2.715, p = .008$, to agree with the statement that “most men who are raped by a man are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting back.” Heterosexual respondents were also significantly more likely to agree with this statement than were lesbian respondents, $t(60) = -2.008, p = .049$, or queer respondents, $t(70) = -2.428, p = .018$. Third, gay respondents were significantly more likely than lesbian respondents, $t(75) = -2.319, p = .023$; bisexual respondents, $t(68) = 2.391, p = .020$; and queer respondents, $t(84) = 3.005, p = .003$, to agree with the statement, “Most men who are raped by a man are somewhat to blame for not being more careful.”

Heterosexual respondents provided the highest level of agreement, significantly higher than the ratings provided by lesbian respondents, $t(60) = -2.307, p = .025$; bisexual respondents, $t(53) = -2.289, p = .026$; and queer respondents, $t(69) = -2.862, p = .006$. The ratings provided by gay and heterosexual respondents did not differ significantly from each other. Finally, the rape myth just discussed but depicting a female perpetrator also resulted in between-group differences. Specifically, gay respondents were significantly more likely than bisexual respondents, $t(68) = 2.45, p = .017$, and queer respondents, $t(85) = 2.419, p = .018$, to agree that “most men who are raped by a woman are somewhat to blame for not being more careful.”

DISCUSSION

A central goal of this work was to consider the relevance of using traditional survey instruments (IRMAS and the MRS) in LGBQ populations. Given that significant differences were found, these instruments arguably retain their utility. However, the low levels of rape myth adherence suggest that there may be additional, more interesting beliefs that have not yet been assessed. That is, LGBQ respondents clearly exhibit *some* rape myth adherence but to myths that may be not be relevant to this community. From a purely descriptive standpoint, the LGBQ respondents in this sample differed from the heterosexual allies in their rates of sexual victimization (more than 40% of all LGBTQ categories compared to 17% of heterosexual respondents) and their likelihood of disclosure (100% of heterosexual victims but only 75% of lesbians). The overrepresentation of LGBQ community members in sexual assault victimization is consistent with other research (e.g., Walters et al., 2013). Lower rates of disclosure among LGBQ respondents (compared to their heterosexual allies) are expected, given the additional stigma that a sexual minority may face. However, this finding is troubling because without disclosure a survivor cannot receive support services (although the current lack of support services for LGBQ community may also reduce disclosures). We would expect that the social reactions received by those to whom survivors disclose are impacted by rape myth attitudes. Clearly, the measurement of rape myths is important, and this research shed some insight on three particular research questions.

Which Rape Myths Are Most Relevant to This Sample of LGBQ Respondents and Allies?

Not all rape myths were equally relevant to this sample of respondents. Myths related to physical resistance were supported by very few respondents. However, myths focused on the male sex drive and female dishonesty were somewhat supported. Both of these types of rape myths are problematic in that they undermine the victim. In the LGBQ community, support for the male sex drive discourse may be especially problematic if it is also applied to male victims (i.e., “He must have liked it,” “Men don’t turn down sex”). Trivializing sexual assault as experienced by male victims of female perpetrators was present in this sample’s disbelief that such a victim would be “very upset” by the assault (compared to a same-sex encounter). Although respondents appeared to support IRMAS statements believing female victims based on gendered perceptions of moral deficiencies (females’ perceived tendencies toward vengeance and manipulation), respondents disbelieved male victims based on gendered expectations of physical strength. Female victims of male perpetrators did not appear to have to prove physical resistance to be believed. However,

respondents were less likely to believe that males could be raped by female perpetrators, presumably because of differences in strength. This double standard was evident in questions addressing same-sex sexual assault as well. Although this sample did not strongly conform to rape myths, the variety in significant differences demonstrate that some rape myths are more relevant than others.

Does Gender Remain Significant Among LGBQ Respondents?

Males were more likely than females to support several rape myths, a finding which suggests that male identity remains salient in perceptions of sexual assault. Although the LGBQ community is generally perceived as more aware of issues related to gender and sexual identity, gender remained a significant predictor of rape myth adherence. Most lesbian, bisexual, queer, and heterosexual respondents in this sample identified as female. If gender were the only relevant predictor, we would expect to see significant differences between respondents who identify as gay and each other sexual orientation; this, however, was not the case.

Does Rape Myth Adherence Differ Based on Respondents' Sexual Orientations?

The most consistent between-group difference based on sexual orientation was between gay and queer respondents. For eight of the nine statements characterized by between-group differences, gay respondents were significantly more rape myth adhering than were queer respondents. The concept of *gendered heterosexism* (Friedman & Leaper, 2010) may explain this finding in that most of the gay respondents identified as male. Notably, there were no significant differences detected between the mean ratings provided by gay and heterosexual respondents for any of the items tested here, which may suggest that gay respondents resemble heterosexual respondents in beliefs about sexual assault more than lesbian, bisexual, and queer respondents. The sample's heterosexual respondents likely do not represent the average heterosexual college-aged individual given that we recruited participants primarily from LGBTQ-friendly organizations.

Overall, queer respondents were significantly less likely than other sexual orientation groups to adhere to rape myths, particularly in comparison to gay respondents. Our analyses here are limited to quantitative indicators, which lend themselves to statistical testing but make deeper interpretation difficult. Rollins and Hirsch's (2003) findings demonstrating diversity among queer-identifying individuals remind us of the pitfalls of essentialism. Nonetheless, because of a tendency toward higher levels of social activism (Gray & Desmarais, 2014), queer-identified individuals may be less rape myth adhering. Literature seems to support the idea that queer-identified individuals are generally less likely to support the gender binary (even when identifying as male or female) than non-queer-identified individuals. By one definition, the term *queer* challenges gender constructions, not just sexual orientation (e.g., Woods, 2015). This is not a new argument, but the fact that queer respondents in this sample appear to adhere to fewer rape myths than gay respondents may suggest that the more inclusive ideas about gender and sex also lead to a more empathetic and comprehensive understanding of sexual assault.

Despite the tendency of researchers to focus on rape myths at the individual-level (as we do here), rape myths are an important part of the macro-level structural processes that contribute to what is known as a *rape culture*. At the societal level, ideas that serve to

delegitimize the experience of sexual assault and shift blame from perpetrators to victims are pervasive and must be understood before they can be discredited. If victimization experiences are devalued because of the continued existence of rape myths, the true nature of sexual assault is silenced and the needs of sexual assault survivors go unmet.

We recognize that our categorical measurement of sexual orientations and genders does not represent the entire spectrum of these important identity characteristics. These choices were based in methodological necessity to make between-group comparisons and are not an assertion by the authors that sexual orientation or gender should be operationalized as a discrete set of choices. Future research allowing for qualitative descriptions of these important concepts would be useful and aid in the construction of survey instruments that better reflect the lives and experiences of diverse communities.

Our failure to detect more significant differences across sexual orientations does not necessarily mean that none exist. Perhaps, this sample was too small to detect all differences. We used multiple recruiting methods throughout the United States primarily aimed at college participants during the summer months but could not offer financial incentives to all participants. The timing and lack of a financial incentive for the time devoted may have negatively impacted our final sample size. Another potential contributor to the lack of significant differences is that individuals not associated with LGBQ organizations were unlikely to receive the request for participation. It is possible that such individuals hold different levels of rape myth adherence, especially given Gold, Marx, and Lexington's (2007) findings about internalized homophobia and sexual assault. The fact that many of our respondents were recruited through LGBQ organizations suggests that our participants were more informed about rape myths than the average college student. Yet, regardless of membership in specific groups, the discrimination experienced by sexual minorities may promote a commitment to social activism dedicated to confronting societal misperceptions about sexuality and gender (see Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Friedman & Leaper, 2010). Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing the number of respondents recruited from each listserv, or other recruitment methods, because we did not ask survey respondents how they had been recruited. We were hoping to promote a sense of anonymity for our respondents, who provided information on such a sensitive topic (including detailed questions about experiences of sexual assault).

Four major strengths of this study are noteworthy. First, we address a relationship that has been underresearched: the impact of sexual orientation on rape myth adherence. Second, we intentionally recruited a sample composed primarily of individuals who identify as LGBQ. This is unique to studies of rape myth adherence and is what allowed us to make comparisons based on sexual orientation. Third, the online nature of the survey allowed for greater regional diversity, which should mitigate any regional differences. Fourth, we modified Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson's (1992) MRS to introduce an instrument that is more inclusive of the diverse gender dynamics of sexual assault.

This study is one of the first to indicate that rape myth adherence differs by sexual orientation. Beyond the academic discourse, there are substantive and ethical reasons that we should focus on LGBQ and transgender populations: Sexual assault victims are disproportionately from the LGBQ community and sometimes targeted by perpetrators *because of their sexual orientation* (Waldner & Berg, 2008). To better understand the social dynamics of sexual assault and to improve educational initiatives, response, and prevention services, a better understanding of how sexual orientation impacts social perceptions of sexual assault is needed.

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